



Professor Kenneth Samples

**WORLDVIEWS IN TENSION:  
CAN THEOLOGY INFORM THE  
PRACTICE OF SCIENCE?**

# Paul Davies

Distinguished physicist  
and cosmologist

Arizona State University



## Davies: Templeton Prize Address

- “In the ensuing three hundred years the theological dimension of science has faded. People take it for granted that the physical world is both ordered and intelligible. The underlying order in nature—the laws of physics—are simply accepted as given, as brute facts. Nobody asks where they came from; at least they do not do so in polite company.

# Davies: Templeton Prize Address

- However, even the most atheistic scientist accepts as an act of faith that the universe is not absurd, that there is a rational basis to physical existence manifested as lawlike order in nature that is at least part comprehensible to us. So science can proceed only if the scientist adopts an essentially theological worldview."

Paul Davies, "Physics and the Mind of God: The Templeton Prize Address"

# Worldview

- What in the world is a worldview?
- In the simplest terms, a worldview may be defined as how one sees life and the world at large.

# Weltanschauung

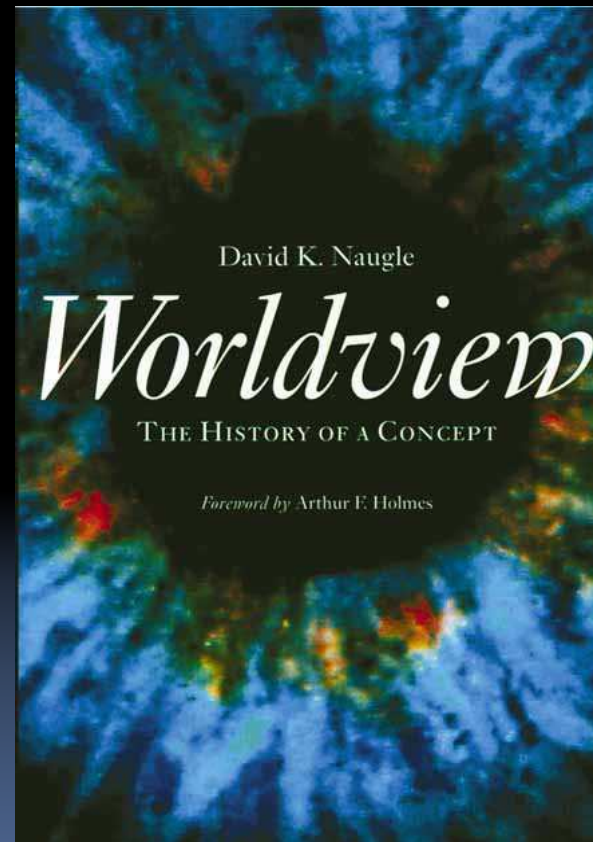
- Derived from the German term *Weltanschauung*, the word “worldview” refers to the cluster of beliefs a person holds about the most significant issues of life—such as God, the cosmos, knowledge, values, humanity, and history.

# Worldview Perspective

- These beliefs form a big picture, a general outlook, or a grand perspective on life and the world.

# David Naugle

Conceiving of Christianity as encompassing a world-and-life view is largely the product of Protestant evangelicals.





# The Late Emergence of Science

- A latecomer on the scene of human history, modern experimental science emerged in Europe around the middle of the seventeenth century.
- But why didn't it come forth sooner, breaking out all around the globe?

# Worldview & Science

- The scientific endeavor can take root only in the fertile soil of a worldview that is conducive to science.

# Inhibiting Progress

- And not every culture subscribes to a worldview conducive to science. In fact, the foundational philosophical thinking in many historic cultures clearly inhibited progress toward a scientific outlook.

# Science is Stillborn

- Catholic historian and philosopher of science Stanley Jaki has argued that science was “stillborn” in other great civilizations outside of Christian Europe because prevailing ideas not only failed to nourish but also stifled its development.

# Technologically Advanced Civilizations

- India
- China
- Egypt
- Greece
- Rome
- Baghdad

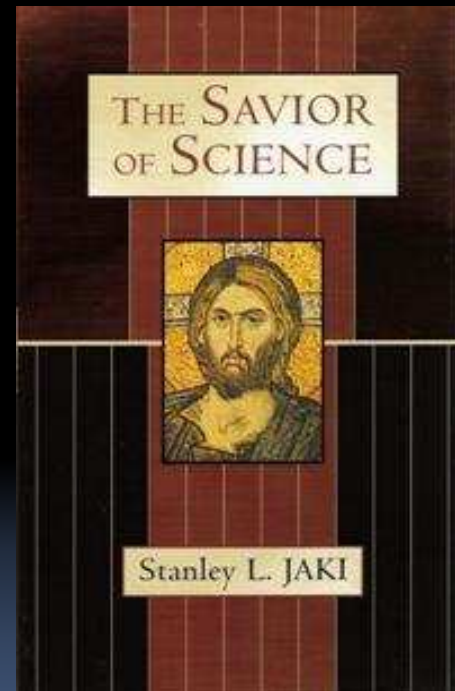
# Worldview & Science

- According to Jaki, pagan beliefs about reality prevented earlier civilizations from developing a self-sustaining form of scientific inquiry.

# Pagan Impediments

- Cyclical View of Time
- Astrology
- Deifying Nature
- Denying Nature
- Arbitrary and Whimsical Nature of God(s)

# Stanley Jaki





# Christian Worldview

- **Christianity & Science**

Allies or Enemies?

How about the Dark Ages?

How about the Enlightenment?

# Christian Medieval Incentives

- Alister McGrath: The Medieval Synthesis
  1. Translation of important Greek and Arabic science related texts into Latin
  2. Establishment of the great universities of Western Europe
  3. Christian theologians and philosophers affirming the value of studying nature

# Enlightenment Era

- The scientific thinkers of the Enlightenment era by-and-large utilized borrowed Christian capital in their scientific pursuits.

# In a Christian Cradle

- Modern experimental science was born and nurtured and ultimately flourished within the Christian European civilization because the Christian vision of reality possesses all the necessary presuppositions to undergird the scientific enterprise.

# Presuppositions of Science

- The following ten points reflect how the Christian worldview anticipated, shaped, encouraged, justified, and sustained the general character and presuppositions of modern science.

# Undergirding Science

- The Christian worldview undergirds science by its recognition of these ten truths:

- 1. The Physical universe is a distinct, objective reality.**

# Undergirding Science

**2. The laws of nature exhibit order, patterns, and regularity.**

# Undergirding Science

3. The laws of nature are uniform throughout the physical universe.



# Undergirding Science

**4. The physical universe is intelligible.**

# Undergirding Science

5. The world is good, valuable, and worthy of careful study.

# Undergirding Science

6. Because the world is not divine and therefore not a proper object of worship, it can be an object of rational study.

# Undergirding Science

7. Human beings possess the ability to discover the universe's intelligibility.

# Undergirding Science

**8. The free agency of the Creator makes the empirical method necessary.**

# Undergirding Science

9. God encourages, even propels, science through his imperative to humans to take dominion over nature.

# Undergirding Science

**10. The intellectual virtues essential to carrying out the scientific enterprise are part of God's moral Law.**

# Pre-Commitments (Beliefs)

- **Scientific Assumptions**

- Objective reality of the cosmos
- Intelligibility of the cosmos
- Validity of mathematics and logic
- Basic reliability of human cognitive abilities and sensory organs
- Congruence between the human mind and physical reality



# Theology & Science

- **Can theology inform the practice of science?**
- Christian theology provided the conceptual framework for science to thrive
- Christian theology can serve to augment the explanatory power of science
- Christian theology can provide a metaphysical anchor for the limits of science

# Two Books

- **Belgic Confession (1561)**

Article 2: The Means by Which We Know God

# Book of Nature

- “We know him by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: his eternal power and his divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20.

# Book of Scripture

- Second, he makes himself known to us more openly by his holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for his glory and for the salvation of his own."

# Paul Davies

- “Taking Science on Faith” (NY Times: 11/24/07)
- “Over the years I have often asked my physicist colleagues why the laws of physics are what they are. The answers vary from ‘that’s not a scientific question’ to ‘nobody knows.’ The favorite reply is, ‘There is no reason they are what they are—they just are.’”

# Paul Davies

The idea that the laws exist reasonlessly is deeply anti-rational. After all, the very essence of a scientific explanation of some phenomenon is that the world is ordered logically and that there are reasons things are as they are. If one traces these reasons all the way down to the bedrock of reality—the laws of physics—only to find that reason then deserts us, it makes a mockery of science.”

# Historic Christianity



# Science-Faith Issues

